

## Helpful Article #6: “Relocation Fears”

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Anthony and Linda had been married 14 years when they made the decision to separate and now to divorce. They had three children ages 4, 7, and 9 years old. The couple owned a home in Suffolk County, New York. Anthony was born and raised in the area and even attended local colleges where he earned his B.A., M.A. and teaching certificates. Linda was also raised in Long Island and was an only child. Her parents moved to Florida five years ago. She misses their day-to-day support especially now that her marriage is ending. Linda is employed as a school secretary. She has worked throughout the marriage and is vested in her pension fund. Anthony has been a public school teacher for the past 17 years and is also vested in his state pension plan. The couple own a home, which is mortgage free, thanks to a significant gift from the wife’s parents.

Anthony and Linda entered the mediation process very anxious and upset. Upon questioning, it became clear that he initiated the divorce and that she was reconciled to its happening. They are a couple in their early 40’s who seem almost too nice to one another. Together my partner and I are a co-mediation team whom Anthony and Linda chose because I am a man with a background in mental health and divorce mediation, while my partner is a woman who is a licensed attorney as well as a trained divorce mediator. The couple made it clear to us that they appreciated the fact that there’s another man and woman in the office because it provides a gender balance as well as the overall sense of neutrality that divorce mediators maintain.

Anthony and Linda seemed to have agreement between them regarding many of the key areas of their divorce such as custody and visitation, child support, the disposition of the marital residence as well as other assets and liabilities. Still, something was feeding their anxious appearance and it became obvious what it was when we asked where they thought they would need more of our help.

The Problem: Anthony reluctantly responded by saying that Linda was considering moving with the children to Florida so that they could all be near her parents. He added that while Linda had not made up her mind as of yet, she would give herself at least a year before moving to see how she and the children adjusted. Linda confirmed what Anthony shared with us and added that she felt her parents could be a major resource in assisting her with the children.

Our intervention consisted of helping the couple to realize that neither party can control the actions of the other. The idea of one parent relocating with the children often leaves the other parent feeling powerless and angry because of the anticipated loss. We helped Anthony and Linda to understand how they could remain resources to one another in rearing the children. Anthony accepted specific parenting tasks that Linda felt would definitely help her. We explored with Linda her future goals and in doing so Anthony agreed to pay a percentage of the schooling for Linda to achieve those goals. A thorough parenting plan was drafted which included language which stated that neither parent could relocate beyond fifty miles of the children’s school district without first sitting down with the other parent to discuss who would remain the primary residential/custodial parent. Such a move would also require the drafting of a new visitation schedule and decisions around sharing the travel costs incurred when the children visit the non-residential/custodial parent. In effect, the couple reassured each other that they could work toward being resources for one another when it came to parenting their children. A process was now in place to address the future possibility that either parent might want to relocate but for now that was no longer a concern for either of them.

Anthony and Linda avoided what could have been a major stumbling block to a successfully mediated divorce agreement by exploring options that were mutually beneficial to each of them. You can do the same by contacting the mediators at New York Divorce Mediation today.